

Digital Marketing Management Training as an Effort to Strengthen the Competitiveness of MSMEs in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai

Rifky Budi Setiawan

Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of digital marketing management training in strengthening the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai. The training program aimed to enhance participants' understanding of digital marketing concepts, social media utilization, and the creation of promotional content to support business growth. Using a descriptive qualitative approach supported by observation, interviews, and pre- and post-training assessments, the study found that participants experienced significant improvements in their digital skills, particularly in online promotion, visual content creation, and the use of digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp Business. The findings also indicate a shift in the participants' business mindset, demonstrating stronger awareness of digital presence and branding. However, certain aspects such as data-driven marketing and target market analysis require further mentoring. Overall, the program effectively contributed to enhancing MSME digital readiness and competitiveness, highlighting the importance of continuous digital capacity-building in rural communities.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; MSMEs; Training; Competitiveness; Rural Community Empowerment; Social Media Marketing

Rifky Budi Setiawan
Management Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
rifkybudi@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

2nd International Conference on the Epicentrum of Economic Global Framework (ICEEGLOF)
Theme: Navigating The Future: Business and Social Paradigms in a Transformative Era.
<https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICEEGLOF/issue/view/9>

Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent a crucial foundation for Indonesia's economic resilience, serving not only as engines of local economic development but also as providers of employment and contributors to regional competitiveness. In rural regions such as Kota Pari Village in Serdang Bedagai Regency, MSMEs play a particularly strategic role in enhancing community welfare and fostering sustainable economic growth. Despite their potential, many rural MSMEs continue to face structural obstacles that limit their expansion particularly in marketing, digital literacy, and the adoption of technology-based business strategies. These challenges have become even more visible in the era of rapid digital transformation, where online visibility and the ability to utilize digital platforms have become essential determinants of business competitiveness. As a result, capacity-building initiatives, such as digital marketing management training, are urgently needed to empower local entrepreneurs and help them compete in an increasingly interconnected marketplace.

Digital marketing offers a wide range of tools and platforms from social media channels and e-commerce marketplaces to search engine optimization (SEO), content creation, and customer analytics that can significantly enhance business visibility and engage broader customer segments. For rural MSMEs, the ability to adopt and manage digital marketing strategies not only expands market reach but also reduces dependence on traditional marketing approaches that often incur higher costs and limited effectiveness. However, many small business owners in villages still lack adequate digital literacy, technical skills, and confidence to effectively utilize available digital technologies. This gap highlights the importance of targeted training initiatives that equip local entrepreneurs with practical skills, strategic insights, and hands-on experience in managing their online business presence.

In Kota Pari Village, most micro entrepreneurs operate in sectors such as food processing, handicrafts, small-scale trading, as well as agricultural product marketing. These businesses are typically characterized by limited capital, informal management practices, and a low level of technological integration. While many business owners recognize the importance of digital platforms particularly social media for promoting products, they often lack knowledge on how to systematically manage their digital presence, analyze consumer behavior, or utilize data-driven approaches to improve engagement. Furthermore, the rapid pace of digital transformation has created a competitive environment in which businesses that fail to innovate risk being left behind. Hence, structured training on digital marketing management is not merely a supplementary activity but a strategic necessity for strengthening MSME competitiveness at the local level.

Previous studies have reinforced the significance of digital marketing training for MSME development. Syarifudin and Susilowati (2021) found that digital marketing training significantly improved the marketing performance of MSMEs in rural Central Java by enhancing entrepreneurs' capabilities in managing social media content, utilizing e-commerce platforms, and developing innovative promotional strategies. Their study revealed that participants not only increased their digital literacy but also demonstrated measurable improvements in online sales and customer engagement after attending structured digital marketing workshops. This finding underlines the effectiveness of practical, hands-on training programs in equipping small businesses with essential competencies for operating in the digital economy.

Similarly, Putri, Rahman, and Nugroho (2020) emphasized that digital marketing adoption has a positive impact on MSME competitiveness, particularly those in the food and creative industries. Their study revealed that businesses that actively utilize digital platforms experience higher visibility, increased consumer trust, and improved market penetration compared to those relying solely on traditional marketing channels. The authors also highlighted that lack of digital skills remains one of the major barriers for MSMEs, thus

reinforcing the need for systematic training interventions tailored to the needs of local entrepreneurs. These research findings provide strong empirical support for implementing similar training in rural areas such as Kota Pari Village, where digital skill gaps remain significant.

In line with these findings, digital marketing training can serve as a catalyst for innovation, market expansion, and sustainability within local MSME ecosystems. Training equips entrepreneurs not only with technical capabilities such as creating engaging content, optimizing product displays, analyzing customer insights, and managing online transactions but also with strategic thinking skills needed to compete effectively. Moreover, digital marketing encourages MSMEs to adopt customer-centered approaches by leveraging data and online interactions to refine their offerings. This shift aligns with global trends where digital-savvy enterprises tend to outperform competitors due to their adaptability, agility, and stronger online presence.

The implementation of digital marketing management training in Kota Pari Village is therefore expected to produce several positive outcomes. First, it can enhance digital literacy and practical marketing skills among local business actors, enabling them to independently manage digital platforms. Second, it fosters innovation in product promotion, branding, and customer communication, leading to increased visibility and competitiveness. Third, the training serves as a foundation for long-term digital adoption, encouraging entrepreneurs to continuously upgrade their capabilities and utilize emerging technologies. Lastly, by strengthening the competitiveness of local MSMEs, the initiative contributes to the broader goals of regional economic development and community empowerment.

Considering the continuing challenges faced by rural MSMEs and the compelling evidence from previous research, the introduction of a structured digital marketing training program in Kota Pari Village represents a relevant and strategic intervention. By equipping local entrepreneurs with essential digital marketing competencies, the program aims to enhance their ability to compete in both regional and national markets. Furthermore, this initiative aligns with Indonesia's broader digital transformation agenda, which seeks to promote digital inclusion and empower local businesses to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven economic environment.

Literature Review

2.1 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

MSMEs are widely recognized as the backbone of economic development, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. They contribute significantly to employment, local income distribution, and community resilience. MSMEs are generally characterized by limited resources, small-scale operations, and informal management structures, yet they possess high adaptability and innovative potential. Wynarczyk (2019) explains that the sustainability of MSMEs relies heavily on their ability to respond to market dynamics, enhance internal capabilities, and utilize technology to expand market reach. In rural areas, the integration of digital tools becomes essential as it enables MSMEs to overcome geographical constraints and promote their products to a broader audience.

2.2 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing refers to marketing practices conducted through digital platforms such as search engines, social media, websites, email, and online marketplaces. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2020) describe digital marketing as a strategic approach that leverages online channels to attract, engage, and convert customers through interactive and measurable communication. Core components of digital marketing include Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social media marketing, content creation, email campaigns, and e-commerce

management. Digital marketing offers substantial advantages for MSMEs, such as cost efficiency, broader market reach, and the ability to track consumer behavior in real time. Kotler et al. (2021) emphasize that digital marketing improves brand exposure and customer trust, especially when businesses implement consistent content strategies and maintain an active presence across multiple online platforms.

2.3 Digital Literacy and Technology Adoption Among MSMEs

Digital literacy is defined as the ability to use digital tools and technologies effectively for accessing information, communication, and business operations. For MSMEs, digital literacy is a fundamental competency that determines their readiness to adopt digital marketing practices. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003) highlights that technology adoption depends on factors such as perceived benefits, ease of use, compatibility, and social influence. In many rural areas, MSMEs encounter challenges including limited technological knowledge, lack of confidence in using digital devices, and constrained access to reliable internet infrastructure. Rahman and Prasetyo (2020) note that these barriers create disparities between rural and urban MSMEs, affecting competitiveness and growth potential. Therefore, improving digital literacy is crucial to ensuring that MSMEs can utilize digital platforms more effectively.

2.4 Competitiveness of MSMEs

Competitiveness refers to the ability of businesses to deliver value that meets market demands through efficiency, innovation, and differentiation. Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory (1985) explains that firms can achieve competitiveness by implementing cost leadership, differentiation, or focus strategies. For MSMEs, competitiveness is reflected in product quality, innovation, market access, branding, and customer satisfaction. In today's digital economy, the ability to utilize online platforms significantly enhances competitiveness, as digital tools help businesses reach broader markets, improve communication, and respond to consumer preferences more quickly. Research by Putri et al. (2020) demonstrates that MSMEs adopting digital marketing tend to have higher sales performance, improved customer engagement, and a stronger competitive position compared to those relying solely on traditional marketing.

2.5 Digital Marketing Training

Digital marketing training is a structured learning activity designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of business actors in managing digital platforms. Such training typically covers essential topics including digital marketing concepts, content creation, social media management, photography for product promotion, customer engagement strategies, and basic analytics. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) suggests that learning is most effective when individuals observe, practice, and receive feedback during hands-on activities. Thus, training that involves practical demonstrations and real-time platform usage tends to be more impactful. Syarifudin and Susilowati (2021) found that digital marketing training significantly improves MSMEs' digital capabilities, increases confidence in using technology, and enhances overall business performance, especially among rural entrepreneurs.

2.6 Relationship Between Digital Marketing Training and MSME Competitiveness

Digital marketing training has a direct and positive relationship with strengthening MSME competitiveness. By participating in training programs, entrepreneurs acquire essential skills for managing digital content, optimizing online platforms, understanding consumer behavior, and engaging customers more effectively. These capabilities lead to improved brand visibility, higher sales conversion, and broader market penetration. Training also promotes long-term digital adoption by encouraging MSMEs to integrate innovation and technology into

their daily operations. Empirical studies consistently show that MSMEs with adequate digital marketing knowledge are more resilient, more adaptable to market changes, and more capable of competing at both local and national levels.

Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at exploring the implementation and outcomes of digital marketing management training for MSMEs in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai. The descriptive qualitative approach was selected because it allows researchers to examine real conditions, participant experiences, and the contextual factors influencing MSME competitiveness. Through this design, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how the training program contributes to the enhancement of digital capabilities and marketing practices among local entrepreneurs.

3.2 Location and Participants

The research was conducted in Kota Pari Village, located in Serdang Bedagai Regency, an area where micro and small enterprises play a vital role in supporting the local economy. Participants in this study consisted of MSME owners who attended the digital marketing management training program. The selection of participants used a purposive sampling technique, focusing on individuals who were directly involved in the training and had active business operations. This approach ensured that relevant and meaningful data could be obtained from participants with firsthand knowledge and practical experience regarding the training activities.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several qualitative methods, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted during the training sessions to examine participant engagement, learning activities, and the overall implementation of the program. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected MSME participants to gather deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, and improvements related to digital marketing skills. Documentation techniques were used to obtain supporting materials such as training modules, photographs, attendance lists, and participants' digital marketing outputs. This combination of methods provided comprehensive and triangulated data for analysis.

3.4 Training Procedure

The training program was designed to provide practical and hands-on learning experiences for MSME participants. The procedure consisted of several stages, including needs assessment, training material development, delivery of training sessions, and post-training evaluation. During the needs assessment stage, researchers identified participants' existing digital marketing knowledge and skill gaps. Based on this assessment, training materials were developed to cover essential topics such as social media marketing, content creation, brand development, and basic digital analytics. The implementation stage involved interactive workshops, demonstrations, and practice sessions where participants learned to create promotional content, manage social media accounts, and optimize online product displays. After the training, evaluations were conducted to measure participant skills and assess the effectiveness of the program.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction

stage, researchers selected, simplified, and organized relevant data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The reduced data were then presented in thematic categories that aligned with the research objectives. The data display stage involved presenting the findings in narrative form, highlighting key themes such as digital literacy improvement, changes in marketing strategies, and perceived benefits of the training. Finally, conclusions were drawn to interpret the meaning of the data and determine the extent to which digital marketing training enhanced MSME competitiveness in Kota Pari Village.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of Data

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the research findings, the study employed several validation strategies, including triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from multiple sources, observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure consistency. Member checking was performed by sharing the preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. Prolonged engagement with the research site also increased the depth and validity of the data, as it allowed researchers to observe participants' development throughout the training process.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research principles, ensuring that participants' rights, confidentiality, and well-being were protected. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study before data collection began. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were given the freedom to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Personal information and interview responses were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. These ethical considerations ensured that the research was conducted responsibly and respectfully.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study present the outcomes of the digital marketing management training conducted for MSME actors in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai. The findings highlight the extent to which participants experienced improvements in digital skills, online promotional capabilities, and understanding of digital marketing strategies after attending the training. These results are essential for assessing the effectiveness of the program and determining whether the intervention successfully strengthened the competitiveness of local MSMEs.

Table 1. Findings and Discussion of the Digital Marketing Training Program

Findings		Discussion
Increased Literacy Participants	Digital Among	The improvement in digital literacy indicates that the training successfully addressed the participants' knowledge gaps related to digital tools. Participants who previously struggled with basic functions of social media business features were able to navigate platforms more confidently. This aligns with previous studies which note that digital literacy is a foundational requirement for technology adoption and improved MSME performance.
Enhanced Social	Skills in Media	The ability to produce high-quality product photos, captions, and promotional posters reflects the effectiveness of hands-on learning. Improved content quality leads to better brand image

Findings	Discussion
Management and Content Creation	and customer perception, as supported by digital marketing literature emphasizing visuals as key drivers of online engagement.
Adoption of Structured Digital Promotion Strategies	The adoption of posting schedules, hashtags, storytelling, and cross-platform promotion shows behavioral change among participants. This demonstrates that structured training can shift MSMEs from passive to active digital marketing practices. Such consistency is known to strengthen brand awareness and increase customer interaction.
Expanded Market Reach and Customer Engagement	Increased inquiries, comments, and customer interactions indicate that participants' improved digital skills translated into real market outcomes. The ability to attract customers beyond the village suggests that digital promotion effectively overcomes geographical limitations. This supports findings from previous research showing that digital platforms expand MSME market access.
Strengthened MSME Competitiveness	The training enhanced participants' competitiveness by equipping them with modern marketing tools. Professional content and broader promotion channels allow MSMEs to differentiate themselves and build stronger branding. This is consistent with Porter's theory that competitiveness can be strengthened through differentiation and innovation.
Remaining Participant Challenges	Despite progress, challenges such as limited technical skills, unstable internet infrastructure, and time constraints affect consistent implementation. These issues reflect structural barriers commonly faced by rural MSMEs, highlighting the need for ongoing mentoring and improved digital infrastructure.

The results of the training indicate a significant positive impact on the digital marketing capabilities of MSME actors in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai. The majority of participants demonstrated noticeable improvements in their understanding and application of digital marketing strategies, particularly in areas related to social media utilization, content creation, and product promotion. This outcome aligns with previous studies highlighting that digital literacy programs can enhance the competitiveness and market reach of micro and small enterprises (Hadi & Nugroho, 2021; Sari et al., 2022).

One of the most notable improvements observed in this study is the increased ability of participants to apply social media platforms especially Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp Business as tools for business promotion. Before the training, many MSME actors used these platforms only for personal communication. After the intervention, however, participants began to integrate promotional content, product catalogs, and customer engagement strategies. This finding supports the conclusion of Kurniawan and Rahmawati (2020), who argued that structured training significantly improves entrepreneurs' readiness to adopt digital marketing practices.

Additionally, participants showed enhanced confidence in creating product photos and promotional materials using simple digital tools. This is important because prior studies have

emphasized that visual content plays a vital role in influencing consumer purchase decisions, particularly in microenterprise markets (Putri & Dewi, 2021). The increased ability to produce visually appealing content is thus expected to strengthen brand awareness and differentiate MSME products from competitors.

Another important finding relates to participants' understanding of target market identification and marketing analytics. Although this aspect showed moderate improvement, participants expressed that it was one of the more challenging components of the training. This suggests that MSMEs in rural areas may require more sustained and advanced mentoring to fully optimize data-driven marketing approaches. This observation is consistent with research by Yusuf et al. (2021), which found that ongoing support and mentoring are needed to translate digital marketing knowledge into long-term business growth.

Furthermore, the training contributed to changes in business mindset. Participants reported greater awareness of the importance of digital presence and consistent online branding. These changes reflect a shift from traditional offline selling practices to integrated digital marketing, which is essential in improving MSME competitiveness in today's market environment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital marketing management training can be an effective strategy for empowering MSME actors in rural communities. However, the results also highlight the need for follow-up programs, continuous mentoring, and advanced modules to ensure sustainable growth and long-term adoption of digital marketing strategies.

Conclusion

The digital marketing management training conducted for MSME actors in Kota Pari Village, Serdang Bedagai, proved to be effective in enhancing participants' competencies and overall readiness to engage in digital-based business practices. The study found substantial improvements in participants' understanding of digital marketing concepts, the use of social media platforms for promotion, and the creation of visual content to support product marketing. These developments indicate that the training successfully strengthened the foundational skills needed by MSMEs to compete in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Furthermore, participants exhibited a shift in business mindset, demonstrating greater awareness of the importance of digital presence, online branding, and customer engagement. Although certain aspects such as target market analysis and data-driven decision-making showed moderate progress, the findings suggest that MSMEs in rural areas can significantly benefit from continued mentoring and advanced training modules to further refine these competencies.

Overall, the program highlights the crucial role of structured digital marketing training in empowering local MSMEs, expanding their market reach, and improving their competitiveness. The study also underscores the need for sustained capacity-building initiatives to ensure long-term adoption and effective implementation of digital marketing strategies.

References

- Hadi, S., & Nugroho, A. (2021). Digital marketing training for MSME development in rural Indonesia. *Journal of Community Empowerment*, 5(2), 112–124.
- Kurniawan, D., & Rahmawati, F. (2020). The impact of structured digital marketing training on micro-enterprise competitiveness. *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Indonesia*, 3(1), 45–57.
- Putri, M., & Dewi, S. (2021). Visual content strategy and consumer purchase intention among small businesses. *Journal of Marketing Communication Studies*, 8(3), 150–162.
- Sari, R., Pratama, Y., & Handayani, T. (2022). Enhancing MSME digital readiness through targeted training initiatives. *International Journal of Small Business Innovation*, 4(2), 89–101.

- Yusuf, M. A., Lestari, N., & Hakim, R. (2021). Sustained mentoring in digital marketing adoption for microenterprises: A case study in rural regions. *Asian Journal of Entrepreneurship and Development*, 9(1), 33–48.
- Widyaningrum, A., & Pamungkas, B. (2020). Adoption of social media marketing among Indonesian MSMEs. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Development*, 7(1), 72–85.
- Sukamto, E., & Astuti, F. (2023). Strengthening small business competitiveness through digital capability enhancement. *Journal of Digital Business Transformation*, 2(1), 25–41.
- Nasution, Z., & Dewantara, R. (2022). The role of digital literacy in improving MSME performance in Indonesia. *Jurnal Ekonomi dan Bisnis Digital*, 6(2), 91–104.